

Colton Hall and Jail
Pacific Street
Monterey, Monterey County
California

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
1000 Geary Street
San Francisco, California

PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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COLTON HALL AND JAIL

Monterey, Monterey County, California

ADDRESS: Pacific Street,
between Madison and Jefferson Streets
Monterey, California

OWNER: City of Monterey

OCCUPANT: City of Monterey

USE: Museum and City Offices

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The building was the first public building constructed in Monterey after the conquest of California, and it housed the Convention which drafted the Constitution under which California was admitted to Statehood.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Presidio of Monterey was established in 1770; and, under the Spanish and Mexican regimes, Monterey became the capitol of Alta California. Consequently, with the acquisition of California by the United States in 1846 at the conclusion of the Mexican War, the seat of territorial government was established at Monterey.

Walter Colton, who was Chaplain on the USS Congress under Commodore John D. Sloat, was appointed Alcalde for the town of Monterey on July 28, 1846, and was formally elected by the people to the same office on September 14, 1846. He was the first, and only, American Alcalde of Monterey.

There was no suitable building available for use as a town hall nor as a public school. Neither was there any money in the treasury; so Alcalde Colton conceived the plan of financing a building through levying excessive fines on gamblers, drunkards and road house proprietors; also, to minimize the cost, by utilizing convict labor for its construction.

Construction was started in 1847 and completed late 1848, but not dedicated until March 8, 1849. The following is quoted from Colton's diary "Three Years in California": "The Town Hall, on which I have been at work for more than a year, is at last finished. It is built of white stone, quarried from a neighboring hill, and which easily takes the shape you desire. The lower apartments are for schools: the hall over them - seventy feet by thirty - is for public assemblies. The front is ornamented by a portico, which you enter from the hall. It is not an edifice which would attract any attention among public buildings in the United States, but in California it is without a rival. It has been erected out of the slender proceeds of town lots and labor of the convicts, taxes on liquor shops and fines on gamblers."

In this building, from September 1 to October 15, 1849, assembled the Convention which drafted the Constitution under which California was admitted to Statehood, September 9, 1850. The forty-eight delegates met on the upper floor with Robert Semple as chairman and William G. March as Secretary.

When completed, the exterior of the building was of exposed stone; and entrance to the second floor was by means of a stairway through the rear or west wing of the building which formed a "T" plan.

The more elaborate two-story portico and two-way exterior stairs at the front, or east elevation, were added in 1880's at which time the exterior of the building was plastered and scored to common bond ashlar pattern.

The building is now owned by the City of Monterey and the ground floor is used for civic offices, while the second floor is a museum furnished as it was when used for legislative purposes.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION - Colton Hall

The building is a two-story stone masonry structure built on a "T" plan with the wing to the rear of minor importance.

The main element is a rectangular symmetrical block with classic wood cornice and hipped shingle roof. The two-story portico with gable roof is supported by two cylindrical columns which had modified Ionic capitals which have been replaced with simple run mouldings. The two-way exterior stairway parallels the building; and, as it was constructed at a later date, it passes in front of windows of the first story. The portico embraces two narrow double entrance doors to the first and second floors. A prominent chimney is at the center of each end of the building.

Exterior

Overall Dimensions:

The structure has an overall length of 76 feet by 25 feet, 8 inches wide with a rear wing 16 feet wide by 32 feet, 6 inches deep. The portico and exterior stairs project 8 feet, 10 inches and extend approximately 56 feet along the east side.

Foundations and Wall Construction:

The foundations and wall construction are of un-reinforced local stone, defined by California State Bureau of Mines as an indurated, siliceous shale rock (deposit of a combination of clay mud or silt, both salt and fresh water). The walls are approximately 2 feet thick.

Porches, Stairs, Railings, etc:

Six-foot wood stairways, parallel to main facade, lead from ground floor, platform type, open porch to second floor porch. Balusters and newels are of wood turned to pattern. The stair railings terminate at second story with a newel post free of the portico columns and are stiffened by a baluster turned from a 6 by 6 at the mid point. The railing extends across the second story porch between the portico columns.

Fireplaces:

Fireplaces of brick with wood mantles were constructed at each story at either end of the building. The moulding supporting the mantle shelf in main room is of wood mouldings to same detail as the ceiling mould.

Openings - doorways and doors:

The entrance doors are narrow double doors, each leaf $20\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 6 feet, 6 inches, with transoms over. Doors at second floor are five panel with horizontal panel at top and raised panels.

Windows:

Windows at first and second story are 12 by 12-light, double hung without parting beads.

Roof - shape, covering:

Roof is hipped with wood shingles - pitched approximately 8 in 12. A gable roof extends over portico and rear wing.

Interior

Floor Plan:

The ground floor is composed of two rooms with a masonry cross-wall at the center of the building; and one room in the rear wing without communicating doors to the main element.

The second floor contains one large room in the main element and one room in the rear wing.

Ceiling height of main element ground floor is 9 feet, 8 inches; and of the second floor 11 feet, 1 inch. Due to the sloping terrain, the ground floor level of the rear wing is above that of the main element with a ceiling height to the bottom of the exposed ceiling beams of approximately 8 feet, 5 inches. The ceiling height of the second story of the rear wing is 7 feet, 1 inch.

Flooring:

The floors on the ground floor are concrete on grade and on the second floor are $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 8 inches, T&G, in the main element and 1 inch by 12 inches, plank, in the rear wing.

Walls and Ceiling finish:

Walls and ceilings of the main element are plaster with a wood cove moulding at the ceiling intersection. Three cast plaster octagonal medallions ornament the ceiling and from which hang light fixtures.

Doors:

Doors at ground floor are four panel and at second floor are five panel, the same as for exterior.

Trim:

The trim is milled wood. Door and window trim is 7/8 inch by 4-3/4 inch moulded with corner blocks and plynths. Base board is 7/8 inch by 7-3/4 inch with base mould.

Hardware:

Hardware is original rim locks and pin hinges.

Site

The building is situated on sloping terrain at the rear of block facing Pacific Street, with landscaped park area in front of the building.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION - Jail

The building is a one-story stone building constructed in 1854, comprising 6 prison cells and two administration offices with a third room in the wing connecting the building with Colton Hall. The stone is rough granite ashlar, cut to uniform height and irregular length, laid up in running bond and left exposed.

Exterior

Overall dimensions:

The structure is 45 feet deep by 35 feet wide and connected to Colton Hall by a wing approximately 20 feet wide and 19 feet deep.

Foundations and Wall Construction:

The foundations and wall construction are of stone, including interior partitions and vaulted ceilings in rooms, cells and corridor. Walls are 2 feet thick.

Porches, Stairs, etc:

Stone Entrance stoop has three steps on three sides.

Openings - doorways and doors:

Entrance double doors are recessed with barred transom over. Doors have four panels in each leaf. Rear door is security type barred door located at exterior end of central corridor.

Windows:

All windows have steel bar grills. Windows in administration rooms have glazed sash, and cells have bars, only, in openings 6 inches wide by 3 feet high.

Roof - shape, covering:

Hipped roof is of wood frame construction with wood shingle covering, built up over vaulted stone structure.

Interior

Floor plan:

The floor plan is symmetrical with a central corridor dividing two administration rooms at front; and six prison cells (three on either side) separated from administration rooms by a security door of steel bars.

Flooring:

Cement.

Walls and ceiling finish:

Plaster over stone masonry.

Doors:

Cell and security doors are prison type steel bars with security type hardware.

Site

Building is situated immediately south of Colton Hall with the east front in approximate line with the front of Colton Hall, and facing the same landscaped park area fronting on Pacific Street between Madison and Jefferson Streets.

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References and Sources

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2. Historic Spots in California - Hoover and Rensch
3. Three Years in California - Walter Colton
4. Old Monterey - Monterey History and Art Association, Ltd.
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